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Highway 61 Revisited: The Tangled Roots of American Jazz, Blues, Rock, & Country Music

Gene Santoro

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What do Louis Armstrong, Ray Charles, Bob Dylan, Willie Nelson, Tom Waits, Cassandra Wilson, and Ani DiFranco have in common? In Highway 61 Revisited, acclaimed music critic Gene Santoro says the answer is jazz--not just the musical style, but jazzs distinctive ambiance and attitudes. As legendary bebop rebel Charlie Parker once put it, If you dont live it, it wont come out of your horn. Unwinding that Zen-like statement, Santoro traces how jazzs existential art has infused outstanding musicians in nearly every wing of American popular music--blues, folk, gospel, psychedelic rock, country, bluegrass, soul, funk, hiphop--with its parallel process of self-discovery and artistic creation through musical improvisation. Taking less-traveled paths through the last century of American pop, Highway 61 Revisited maps unexpected musical and cultural links between such apparently disparate figures as Louis Armstrong, Willie Nelson, Bob Dylan and Herbie Hancock; Miles Davis, Lenny Bruce, The Grateful Dead, Bruce Springsteen, and many others. Focusing on jazzs power to connect, Santoro shows how the jazz milieu created a fertile space where whites and blacks could meet in America on something like equal grounds, and indeed where art and entertainment, politics and poetry, mainstream culture and its subversive offshoots were drawn together in a heady mix whose influence has proved both far-reaching and seemingly inexhaustible. Combining interviews and original research, and marked throughout by Santoros wide ranging grasp of cultural history, Highway 61 Revisited offers readers a new look at--and a new way of listening to--the many ways jazz has colored the entire range of American popular music in all its dazzling profusion.

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